

When I was in my early 20s, after I graduated from art school, I worked at Sonnabend gallery. On the side, to supplement my income, I got a job working for Richard Artschwager. At that time, in the late 80s, there was an explosion of interest in Artschwager's work. I remember, in particular, a show at Leo Castelli gallery called "Artschwager: Peers and Persuasions," with artists like Ashley Bickerton, Meyer Vaisman, and Peter Halley. As a 23 year old, it was a tremendous privilege to get to know the man – I was in awe.

Artschwager's studio was in a garage behind his house, and after a morning of work, we would all have lunch in the main house seated at a twelve foot long oak dining table. That table is depicted in the "Two Dinners" painting that is in this exhibition, and that painting was made in 1988, the year that I worked for Artschwager. So essentially, I have lived in that painting, and that's my point of entry when I look at it. This seems appropriate, as so much of Artschwager's work is about bridging the gap between the real, practical world, and the other, more mysterious worlds depicted in art.

In "Two Dinners," there are a multitude of worlds depicted – the world atop the table, the world of the room that the table sits in, the world outside through the double doors, the world of the painting, cut off, which hangs next to the doors, and of course the world outside the Formica frame, of Carlson Gallery, in which "Two Dinners" now hangs. But this is really a painting about the two people you can't see, and the spaces that their lives and conversations fill. Like with Artschwager's chair sculptures, the people are not depicted, but the human form is always a phantom presence.

When I look at "Two Dinners," I can't help but hear Artschwager's voice. Part sage, part Nutty Professor, every word seemed considered and wise and I was always enthralled. Most of what I know about Artschwager, I learned in that dining room. I know that he was a Navy man who spent hours in front of a radar screen, where locations are signaled by electronic blips. I know that in the 1960s, he made chairs and tables for a store in NY called The Door Store, and that he was also commissioned to make functional objects for a church. The 'dots' that compose his iconic works -- the recurring blips, sculptures of tables and chairs and pulpits and kneeling benches -- were easy enough to connect. Like that twelve foot oak table I saw those works as locations for both everyday and transcendent experience, stations between physical and spiritual worlds.

I remember one day Artschwager talking about mouse holes, like in cartoons. He was obsessed, and went on and on. These little black arched portals - sometimes graffitied on walls, and of course familiar from children's fairytales - are emergency exits for the little pretend mouse, another world, a safe place. This is how I feel when I look in to one of Artschwager's non-mirror mirrors, like I've left the room and have entered a safe space inside my mind. When Artschwager takes the archetypes

of our daily existence, a mirror, a door, a dining table he provides us with the space to consider the lives that we live. The objects become signifiers of our own existence, challenging us to consider what it is that we do, the relationships we have, including the relationship we forge with the spaces we create or enter into, they are frameworks for the time we spend, and reminders of our own profound physicality.

Rob Pruitt, Feb. 2011 - London

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